

VZCZCXR08584
PP RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHYG #0055 2221021
ZNR UUUU ZZH
P R 101021Z AUG 09
FM AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1351
INFO RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0996
RUEHLN/AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG 0587
RUEHVK/AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK 0597
RUEHYG/AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG 1388

UNCLAS YEKATERINBURG 000055

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DRL FOR S. CORKE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PHUM SOCI RS
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE ARREST OF ANDREY SOKOLOV

REF: A. A) YEKAT 30
1B. B) YEKAT 54

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11. (U) This is an action request for DRL. See paragraph 5.

12. (SBU) Pol/Econ officer met with the lawyer representing arrested prisoners' rights activist Alexey Sokolov (see ref A) on August 5 for an update on the case. The court allowed Sokolov's release on bail on July 31 but he was rearrested the same day on suspicion of participation in the theft of petroleum products from an oil pipeline in 2004. Both crimes were allegedly committed by the same criminal group, of which Sokolov was allegedly a member. All other members of the group have already been convicted and cases involving Sokolov were closed in 2005. Sokolov assured his lawyer that he is not being mistreated and has enough to eat. With this latest detention, however, he is not allowed to read newspapers or magazines. Further hearings in the case will probably not be scheduled until the end of August.

13. (SBU) Law enforcement officers informed Sokolov's lawyer unofficially that there may be 22 additional cases in which Sokolov could be implicated. The information on these cases was received from a witness currently serving jail time. A second witness against Sokolov was found hung in his jail cell in June. The lawyer told us that charges in the additional cases against Sokolov, who previously served a seven-year sentence, were dismissed in 2004-2005; Sokolov's lawyer is convinced that his client's activity in defense of prisoners' rights has made him the target of law enforcement agencies. There is speculation that the harassment of Sokolov is being instigated at the federal level. We were told that Sokolov's activism angered an LDPR State Duma deputy who is head of the duma Federal Security Committee. The Urals region PolPred office is also said to support the police against Sokolov, although the prosecutor reportedly was ready to free Sokolov on bail.

14. (SBU) Since 2008 Sokolov has been a member of the Sverdlovsk Regional Committee for Public Observance of Human Rights in Penitentiaries. Regional committees were created by the Russian Federation Public Chamber. The committees have unrestricted access to penitentiaries and may visit detention centers without prior notification. Incrimination of a committee member results in the suspension of the member; upon being charged with a crime, Sokolov lost access to penitentiaries, a possible motive to keep him in custody. Another member of the Sverdlovsk Committee, Dmitry Rogozhin, has also been accused of a crime; although he has not yet been arrested, he is not allowed to leave the country.

15. (U) Action Request: Sokolov's modest income from his Legal Basis NGO was the family's sole income. His wife Gulya and two-year-old daughter are now in difficult circumstances.

Although Sutyazhnik and Za Prava Chelovyeka NGOs have opened a bank account for public donations for legal defense and to support Sokolov's family, donations are not exactly pouring in. At the same time, the case requires more sophisticated legal assistance as new "confessions" and accusations emerge. Post requests DRL assistance in applying for a Human Rights Defenders Fund grant to help support Sokolov's family and legal defense. Post point of contact is Pol/Econ officer Carol Trimble (trimblec@state.gov).

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